

Alumni Interview: David Suh

By Yonatan Hassin

David Suh worked in the New York office until 2010. He was a member of the Debt Finance group. Since then, he has been working at Barclays as internal counsel. Before becoming a summer associate at Cleary, David was a paralegal for two years at Cleary.

Where have you been since you left Cleary?

I have been at Barclays' as internal counsel covering much of the same things I did at Cleary, i.e., loans and leveraged finance.

What do you like most about your time at Barclays?

The practice area is the same, although the job is much different from being an associate at Cleary. Here, you've got one client, the institution, and you're responsible for looking out for the best interests of that client. You probably get a lot of questions that you wouldn't otherwise go to outside counsel for, so there are a lot of miscellaneous things, and it's all under the rubric of lending. A lot of lawyers at firms don't really get to see that. I also get to see a wider breadth of transactions, which I like. Here, you cover all the transactions that we're involved in. We get to utilize external counsel for our deals so I also get to see how different firms do things differently, which is interesting.

How do you think the firms are different? Does each firm have its own unique way of doing things?

I wouldn't say unique, but each firm has a slight difference in the way that they do things. Mainly differences like in culture. There are plenty of excellent law firms so the quality of work may not be too much better or worse; that's probably more dependent on the individual lawyers you have working for you, but I would say the culture is a bit different. I kind of book-ended my career at Cleary with two years at Latham so I can tell you that the cultures are quite different. A good thing about Cleary that I really remember and liked was the collegiality and the willingness of all people to help each other on transactions and pitch in and help each other. I think some of it stems from the lockstep and some from the culture of how Cleary works.

Was that your favorite thing about Cleary?

That, and the cafeteria is pretty good. Cleary has very nice offices and very nice food.

Any tips for junior associates at Cleary?

At Cleary you get a chance to try a bunch of different things and they give you that opportunity so I advise juniors to, even if you are sure about what you want to do, try your hand at different things and practice areas because you never know what will fit best for you. In terms of dealing with clients I would say two things: (1) try to figure out what your client's objectives are and conduct your work in line with those objectives; and (2) the lawyers I like dealing with most are those that actually give advice rather than just presenting "option a" and "option b"—the

more you can get into the habit of giving advice and saying "here are the options and this one is better than the other one for this reason" the more valuable you are to the client. The flip side of this is "here's 'a' and here's 'b,' what do you want to do?"

Any chance to visit the foreign offices?

I did half of my summer in Frankfurt. It was very interesting, a different vibe to it.

What valuable skills do you think you developed at Cleary?

Cleary generally trains you to be a very good lawyer and that serves you well no matter what job you choose to take.

Is there anything you would have done differently given your career path?

I don't think so. I really enjoy my practice area and the people I work with. The only downside is working nights and weekends, but all the practice areas are kind of like that.

What was your favorite project/transaction at Cleary?

Shortly after the financial crisis happened we were working on these TARP facilities and we were representing, I think, the Fed or Citi—probably the Fed (it's been 10 years!)—on one of the TARP facilities. I remember going over to the Fed's offices and counting stock certificates pledged as collateral. Everything was very much an emergency so it wasn't your run-of-the-mill financing. It was very interesting and we were involved with something that was pretty significant at the time.

Transitioning to less work-related stuff, what are some of your hobbies?

Exercise and spending time with my two girls (9 and 13). I like doing interval training and yoga for exercise. You just have to make the time to do it to stay sane and balanced.

Do you have a favorite vacation spot?

Recently I went to Lithuania's capital city and to the beach there. I have been there a couple of times; my wife grew up there so we've been to visit her family. It's a really interesting place! The beach town especially as it seems like everyone in the country goes to this one beach town, and the really cool thing about it is that if you go right over the dunes you're suddenly in the forest. I grew up on the east coast so, to me, that was totally bizarre.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Delaware. So, I guess I was meant to be a corporate lawyer.

What would be your dream job and what's the favorite job you ever had?

I do a lot of pro-bono work at NYC family court. They have a volunteer attorney program where volunteers go for half a day

and talk to people with court dates. The volunteers speak to them either before or after their hearings for half an hour. I found it really helpful and fulfilling and all things being equal if you could do something in that practice area I think it's really cool.

What kind of cases do you typically work on there?

Family law generally deals with custody issues, children, child support, and visitation rights. On occasion, there are questions around family offenses (domestic violence and related issues). It's kind of a small area of law that you can get good at.